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Good Afternoon, Senator Maynard and Representative Graziani. My name is Heather Sandler. I am a wife, mother of a two year old son, a full time graduate student at UCONN School of Social Work, an Intern at the Connecticut Commission on Aging and a Veteran of the United States Navy.

I served ten plus years on active duty loading bombs and missiles on F/A-18 fighter jets. I was deployed four different times for six months at a time. I am a Veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. I served at Naval Air Station Paxtuent River, Maryland during September 11, 2001 and stood guard for 18 hours that day (9/11/2001).

I am here to ask you to close the loopholes in SB 215, An Act Concerning Tuition Waivers for Veterans. I attended the public hearing that you held on February 11, 2010 and I needed to be here today to testify on the Veterans Tuition waiver. I wanted to make a comment that day but was not prepared to control my outrage over the abuse of the Veterans tuition waiver. When I was **HONORABLY** discharged from **ACTIVE DUTY**, I left with minimal benefits, no health insurance, and no privileges to facilities, but I did have my educational benefits. I had the benefits that I **EARNED**. When I decided that I wanted to get out of the Navy to start a life in Connecticut with my now husband I was thrilled to learn about the tuition waiver. I changed my home of record and became a resident of Connecticut one year before my actual discharge date; I left an income tax free state to become a resident of Connecticut, because I wanted to ensure that there was not a question about my residency and eligibility for the program. I wanted to do the right thing; honor and respect are a way of life in the military and it was important for me to ensure that I was not breaking any rules or abusing the privileges that were being provided to me with the tuition waiver.

I am insulted and outraged when I hear of the abuses that people are taking with the Veterans Tuition Waiver and how they are slipping through the loopholes. I know that I **EARNED** my educational benefits serving on active duty and believe that I followed the rules so that I could receive this benefit. They were paid for with 10 years of my life given to honorably serving, two years deployed away from home, countless missed birthdays, weddings, funerals and holidays. I will gladly show anyone who asks my discharge papers (DD214) and even highlight to them that I was actually on active duty for 10 years 3 months and 25 days, and deployed to sea for five of the ten. Since I have gotten out of the Navy in 2005 I have exhausted all of my Montgomery GI Bill benefits with one semester to complete before graduation, I am currently receiving the Post 9/11 benefits as well as the tuition waiver. If not for these programs I would not be graduating in May with a Masters degree in Social Work.

As a Veteran, a resident of Connecticut, and a student I urge you to close the loopholes in the Veterans Tuition Waiver and stop the abuse of a privileged program. Veterans like me who earned it deserve to have these changes made.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony and thank you for taking the time to consider this important issue.

I am open to answer any questions.